

Talk to me!

Customer satisfaction can depend on a very simple service ingredient – communication. But it's so often neglected, as TIM BRYANT knows from personal experience.



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FTSE 100 companies are turning away from purely financial targets towards non-financial business measures – such as assessments of customer satisfaction and employee engagement – when it comes to deciding how much CEOs and senior executives get paid.

In 2006 35% of bonus schemes incorporated non-financial measures; this rose to 57% in 2007, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers' annual executive pay report.

Ultimately, of course, money talks, so it's no surprise to learn that a number of automotive companies are selecting customer satisfaction (commonly referred to as CSI) as their most important business measure for 2008.

So, how is the sector faring in the CSI stakes?

One key guide is the 'Driver Power' survey completed each year by over 30,000 UK drivers (the results of the latest survey are due to appear in Auto Express magazine).

The survey seeks drivers' views on their 'Car Ownership' experience over the previous 12 months, including service/repair. Typical questions include:

How do you rate your dealer on helpfulness and attitude?

How do you rate your dealer on keeping you informed on progress and cost of work?

How do you rate your dealer on technical knowledge?

Highest scoring manufacturer for dealer satisfaction last year (and the previous four years) was Lexus, with an average of more than 90% positive responses from customers.

But although the Driver Power survey provides 'soundbites' from respondents, it's not designed to provide specific examples of what constitutes either 'excellent' or 'poor' customer service practice.

As an automotive trainer, I frequently find that appreciating how not to deliver professional customer service is a powerful lesson in understanding just what 'best practice' should be – simply adopt the very opposite

behaviours!

Last year I became embroiled at a personal level in an experience that illustrated how to score very low in terms of overall 'helpfulness and attitude' and 'communication'.

For over four and a half years my car hadn't once let me down. I had never needed to visit a dealer, except for servicing. Then, just after passing the 100,000 mile mark, the turbocharger packed up.

Having booked in the vehicle, the service advisor said a report would probably be available the following Monday. No courtesy car was available; neither was a driver on hand to give me a lift home, about a mile away.

Monday's report was then deferred until the Wednesday, with an assurance that someone would

phone me. No one did, so I again had to contact the dealer to learn that the cost of a new turbocharger, including labour, would be over £1,000, and work was expected to be completed by the following Thursday, later extended to Monday and finally Tuesday.

Meanwhile, a courtesy car to take me to a business meeting wasn't available the previous evening, as promised, and had to be collected by me at 7.30 the following morning.

Though my loyalty to the brand wasn't dented by this experience – after all, the car had given me 100,000 miles of trouble-free motoring – my loyalty to the dealer certainly was. It wasn't so much the delays; more the frustration at not being kept

informed as to the reasons.

Respondents to the Driver Power survey say that effective communication is the key area that most clearly separates the 'best' from the 'rest'. Things can and will go wrong, but there is simply no excuse for not showing empathy towards customers and keeping them informed.

Anyone in the motor trade would do well to reflect on the following:

"Our customers are the most important visitors on our premises. They are not dependent on us; we are dependent on them. They are not an interruption of our work; they are the purpose of it. They are not outsiders to our business; they are part of it. We are not doing them a favour by serving them;

they are doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so."

It's an extract from McDonald's mission statement.

Customers simply don't tolerate poor service anymore – they go somewhere else.

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To obtain a copy of the 'Driver Power 2008' survey results when they are published, or to receive a copy of the 2007 results, please email **Gemma Pritchard** at gpritchard@rts-uk.co.uk



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